C O N F I D E N T I A L FREETOWN 000716

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TAGS: PREL SL IR
SUBJECT: IRANIAN DELEGATION LEAVES SIERRA LEONE
EMPTY-HANDED FOR NOW

Classified By: Ambassador Thomas N. Hull, reasons 1.4 (b), (d)

¶1. (U) On August 22, Sierra Leone's state broadcasting
network reported the previous day's visit of an Iranian
delegation to Sierra Leone. According to the report, Iranian
Minister of Agriculture Mohammed Reza Eskanderi led a 27-man
delegation that included the Deputy Ministers of Defense,
Energy and Power, Foreign Affairs, Agriculture, and African
Affairs. An Iranian member of parliament and a special
advisor to the President on Youth Affairs also came. The
purpose of the trip to Sierra Leone, Eskanderi said, was to
follow up on the decisions made at July's African Union
summit in Banjul attended by Iranian President Ahmadinejad.
Eskanderi said that the Ministers had been given special
assignments to look at possibilities for cooperation between
Iran and Sierra Leone, particularly with respect to
re-opening the agricultural office in Freetown that had
closed during the war. Eskanderi said that Iran is ready to
re-open their Freetown agricultural office "as soon as
possible" to foster cooperation between the two countries.
Eskanderi also extended an invitation to President Kabbah to
visit President Ahmadinejad in Iran.

¶2. (C) On August 24, Director General of Foreign Affairs
Umaru Wurie proudly told PolOff that he refused to sign an
agreement the Iranians had drafted and meant to sign during
the visit. Wurie said he walked out of the meeting because
the terms of the agreement were contrary to what had been
discussed previously and were unacceptable. Wurie said that
the Iranian Ambassador (SA Tahawghoghi Mehrizi) has had his
nose out of joint ever since and that Sierra Leone-Iran
relations had cooled a bit as a result of Wurie's snub.

¶3. (C) Comment: Although Wurie's description of the event was
surely accurate, any cooling of relations with Iran is likely
to be short-lived. Iran's diplomatic presence in Sierra
Leone is active: one of President Kabbah's first trips after
his election in 1996 was to Iran. Minister of Foreign
Affairs Momodu Koroma (a potential Sierra Leone People's
Party (SLPP) Vice Presidential nominee for the 2007
elections) followed suit in 2002 and Minister of Agriculture
Sama Mondeh traveled there in 2003. In 2004, the Government
of Iran provided Sierra Leone with 21 tractors (acquired as
part of a $1.5 million soft loan). In January 2005, Iranian
President Khatami visited Freetown. In June 2006, Mondeh
hosted a smaller delegation of 15 Iranian investors, during
which the initial discussions on the "unacceptable" agreement
likely took place.

¶4. (C) Comment, cont: Wurie knows that we are miffed with the
Iranians and was probably just trying to make it clear where
his personal sympathies lie. (We recently protested to the
Ministry of Foreign Affairs when Mehrizi publicly accused the
U.S. of "fuelling the ongoing crisis in Lebanon" and "giving

the green light to Israeli aggression.") President Kabbah
has his own beef with the Iranians, and recently expressed
frustration to the Ambassador that the Iranians had not
fulfilled an earlier promise to operate a medical facility in
Freetown. Since our protest, there have been no more public
outbursts, but the Government of Sierra Leone clearly has a
soft spot in its heart for Iran and we expect the
relationship to grow more serious over time, even though
President Kabbah may not be a part of it. Kabbah told the
visiting delegation that he has already visited Iran twice
since taking office, which makes us think that he will
probably not take up Ahmadinejad's invitation to return so
close to the end of his term in 2007. End Comment.
HULL